3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

woman had her home. The other was the 'gate'[1] of the kraal at the opposite end of the enclosure to the 'big house'. The name by which this 'gate' was known applied also to the space on each side of the gap in the kraal fence through which the cattle went out and came in—a gap which was closed at night with heavy poles. Here at the gate the men of the village sat by day, ate their meals brought to them by children from their wives' huts, talked, received strangers, pursued their crafts, and supervised the return of the cattle in the evenings.

In and around the main huts within the tall reed fences, the life of a Ngoni household went on. Some of the huts were rectangular, others round. All had a veranda built up above the ground-level and shaded by the house roof. The back parts of the veranda were often enclosed with mats to make additional storage space. In old Ngoni households the open space around the hut was kept swept and mudded and polished like a floor, so that people could sit there in comfort and cleanliness as well as on the veranda. Near the house was one or more little reed platforms about five feet above the ground, where kitchen utensils, gourds and vegetables were laid to dry, and which were used to sit under as shelter from the sun in the hot months. Large and small wooden pounding mortars and poles, clay pots of every size and shape, mats for sleeping and for drying grain, baskets for many purposes, wooden food trays and spoons, gourds of several shapes, formed the traditional household equipment always to be seen outside and around the hut, as well as inside.

In each household, within the main hut, there were two places of particular significance. One was by the two main door-posts at the entrance. These posts with the hollow for the fireplace in the centre of the floor divided the hut into a right-hand and left-hand side—the men's side and the

[1] and [2] A short list of the vernacular terms for some these common Ngoni place-names is given at end of the book.

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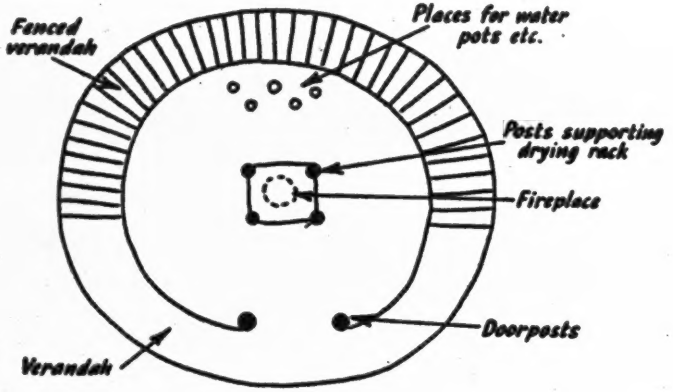

DIAGRAM OF HUT

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417

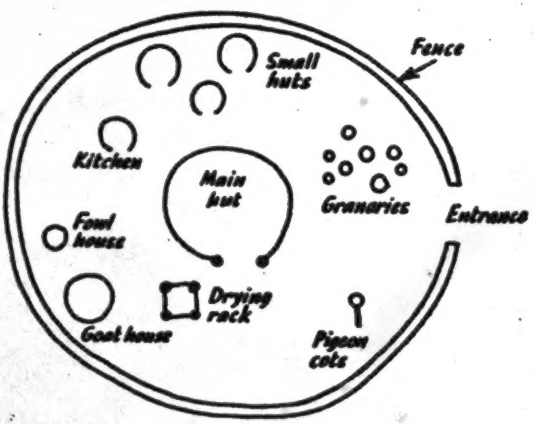

DIAGRAM OF HOUSEHOLD COMPOUND

[p. 74]

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

surroundings were described in Chapter I, but in spite of some repetition I have given a fuller description here to set the stage for the earlier years of a young Ngoni child. In several respects a casual observer, looking at the external appearance of the hut and the objects round it, might fail to distinguish between them and almost any Nyasaland village. Many of the household objects were indeed the same as those used by other Nyasaland peoples. But there was more elaboration about Ngoni huts and compounds; they were as a rule kept in an orderly and clean condition; and there was cultural significance about some of the features of Ngoni households mentioned here and in Chapter I which was not found elsewhere.

To the small child taken to his grandmother's hut at weaning, the space within the fence of her compound was full of interest. There was the hut itself which might be the 'great hut' of the village or one of those known as the 'right hand' and 'left hand' huts. It was generally circular, with interior walls some seven to eight feet high, with a conical roof of tightly packed grass neatly trimmed at the edges and decorated with cows' horns from the peak downwards in four lines. Inside the hut framing the doorway were the two main door-posts, solid and polished with much handling. Four posts in the middle of the floor went up to the rafters and supported cross-bars and a light platform on which gourds, herbs and green vegetables were dried. Under this platform, in the centre of the hut, was the hollow place for the fire and the three rounded hearthstones on which pots were balanced when cooking took place there. Against the back wall of the hut was a slightly raised platform in which were several small hollows for the round bottomed pots holding water, or grain or beans. Surrounding the entire hut was a raised veranda some four to five feet wide, shaded by the projecting roof, and generally fenced in all round the back, thus making extra storage space. All round the front of the hut was a well-swept space, mudded and polished in

10: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1959
FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

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1. Storing finger millet. The untidily thatched building on the right is a dormitory for boys

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2. A queen brewing beer. It is only important people who own oil drums

NGONI

[Facing P. 208]